



ROLE OF VERNACULAR PRESS DURING BRITISH RULE IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

With the establishment of British East India Company and its control over India a new system of politico-socio-economic and culture was started. The main objective of European Companies was to make trade relations with India. But they started interfere the Indian political structure and in the latter half of the eighteenth century captured the control of Bengal after defeating the local rulers. They came to India not only as traders but also their mission was to convert Indian to Christianity. The Christian Missionary was eager to spread the western thoughts and education among the Indian masses. A change was apparent after the introduction of modern press on Indian soil. Hicky, was a foreigner introduced printing media in India who started English weekly. Since then various newspapers were published and circulated in different places in India. During the early days of press the newspapers, journals and magazines published the matters related to individual's affairs, education, training and advertisements etc. During nineteenth century vernacular press aware the Indian people about the propaganda of British Company. After the Revolt of 1857, the vernacular press exposed British barbarism. Indian National Awakening was the prime motive of vernacular newspapers. The press was time and again fined, and censored for their publications against the British Rule. In 1878, under the Lord Lytton's Vernacular Press Act the Indian newspapers were suffered, banned and stop their circulations.

The vernacular press saw various difficulties and hurdles in its way but not stopped its political awareness and freedom struggle until got independence for India in 1947 from the British Imperialism.

KEY WORDS: Vernacular, newspapers, national awakening, press.

Introduction

The communication and printing system can be traced back to the ancient regimes when there was no concept of the modern printing press. There was no enough education, transport and communication system. The Ashokan edicts inscribed on various imperishable material i.e. rocks, stone pillars and copper plates etc, found in different regions of the Indian subcontinent from Gandhara to Bengal. These edicts are the examples of the royal literary development.

During the Gupta period and later kingdoms the written records are found in abundance in vernacular languages like Sanskrit, Pali, and Kharosthi etc. With the advent and establishment of Mughal Empire in India the new style of press had emerged. A well organised communication was started in the form of written newspaper. The handwritten newspapers were circulated after collecting the information from various parts of the country. Freedom was given to the newspaper writers. Sometimes the writers intentionally or unintentionally made wrong information. The progress in press was seen during Akbar's Reign when he organised a well communication office and to maintain records which provided a platform for the medieval Indian historians to collect ample of records for history writing.

Objective

- To study the role of Vernacular newspapers during the 19th and 20th centuries.
- To study the efforts of Nationalist journalists.
- To study the Regulations and Acts of British Indian government.

Modern press in India

It was September 1556 when press arrived in India from Europe. The purpose of the press in India was to propagate and to convert the Indians to Christianity. From 1556 to 1780s there was the lack of publications of newspapers. It was James Augustus Hicky who is known to start the journalism in India by edition, print, publication and circulation the articles of different nature. The first newspaper, Bengal Gazette, was started by him for the local European people resided in Calcutta. The newspaper published no valuable information about political, administrative, social and religious etc. but was full of advertisement and little space was given to individual's affairs. Hicky was fined by Warren Hastings by Rs 80,000, later he was imprisoned for not paid the fine, for published information of Warren Hastings administrative secrets which were provided to him by Philip Francis, a member of the Council of The Governor. So the newspaper was not circulated and also not posted by post office henceforth. This could be the first censorship of the printed media. The Governor General wanted to control the press which published the news against the government. Thus, Hicky was the pioneer of the Indian press and media. Henceforth, the Indian press took impetus to print and publish newspapers. J.S. Buckingham was another European who started Calcutta Journal in 1818. The articles spread the policies of the British officials who later asked to leave the country for his publications. Then licence

system was made compulsory for the press.

The India gazette was started by Mansik in November 1780. In 1784, a weekly Bengal Gazette was started. In 1785, Bengal Journal, in 1785 Oriental Magazine, in 1785 Madras courier in 1789 Bombay Herald, in 1790 Bombay Courier started to circulate.

During the early nineteenth century, Indians were influenced by the press and they started publishing newspapers, magazines and journals in vernacular languages as well. It was the beginning of press in India. Widely circulated newspapers were *Samachar Darpan*, *Bangadarshan*, *Jnanodya*, *Sudhovani Vichar Lahiri*, The Bombay Herald, The Madras Courier, etc. The main purpose of the press was the propagation of the education, people opinion, training and social issues.

Darpan. The first Marathi newspaper was started by Balshastri Jambhekar on 6th January 1832 on fortnightly basis. It became weekly and bilingual in April in the same year, which was composed in 8 pages and subscription was for three months at the cost of six rupees. The news and other matters published in both English and Marathi which provided the valuable information about the Indian and western knowledge. But after eight years of its circulation it was closed on 26 June 1840.

Bangadarshan. A magazine in Bengali was started by Binkim Chander Chatterji in 1872. (Anjaria 2015:32) The magazine educated the people about the importance of various Hindu Religious scriptures which published articles on Veda, Vedanta and Puranas. It tried to make a bridge between intellectual and uneducated to understand the importance of knowledge. It was also the genesis of Bengali Nationalism. Chatterji provided the new spirit to the Bengali Literature (Thiagar 1938:99-100).

Raja Ram Mohan Roy provided new spirit to Indian Journalism, started a bilingual newspaper in Bengali and Persian. He criticised the Indian customs, rite and rituals. His mission was to educate the society to go back to the Vedic education which was the basic and original teachings. He criticised the Christian Missionary for their propaganda on one hand and to reform the Indian society on the other hand. His publications were remained controversial for social reforms like Widow Remarriage, Sati and Child marriage. In 1822, he started *Mirat-ul-Akbar*, a weekly in the Persian language, took interest in publishing articles on international affairs. In 1837, he published *Syed-ul-Akbar*, a weekly in Urdu. Various newspapers were started in other Indian languages in different parts of the country to strengthen the national awakening. In 1838 *Dilli Akbar* was started. Harishchandra Mukherjee started Hindu Patriot in 1840. In 1851 *Rust Gofar*, a Gujarati fortnightly paper was started by Dadabhai Naroji. The growing dissatisfaction in Indians with the political, social, religious and economic exploitation of British East India Company was a serious matter.

Vernacular Press after the revolt of 1857

After the Revolt of 1857, the Indian National Movement was started by the prominent Indian leaders and aware the public by their writings through newspapers. The vernacular Press faced restrictions on its freedom of writing from time and again. Various legislations were passed by the British Indian Government to prevent Indian press to spread political propaganda against them.

The most powerful and famous newspapers were emerged after 1857 for the propagation of National awakening against the British Rule were;

Sudharak. In 1888, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar started a daily newspaper, *Sudharak* in English and Marathi. He spread the message of individual freedom, rationalism and social justice through this newspaper. He strongly opposed the unsocial practices i.e. the Caste System, making widows bald and child marriage.

Kesari. A Marathi newspaper started by Bal Gangadhar Tilaka renowned leader of the Indian freedom movement. In the 1880s the Kohlapur controversy was an event regarding the madness of Shivaji IV, the king of Kolhapur, a princely state of Bombay Presidency. The British officials and doctors declared him as he was suffering from madness and they got the favour of English newspapers such as Bombay Gazette and Times of India to spread the news. But *Kesari* and *Maratha* newspapers disputed this conspiracy. *Kesari* questioned of the diagnosis, treatment and mental health of the Shivaji and argued that the mental state was caused by the British doctors and officials by maltreatment. Through *Kesari*, Tilk continued his mission of political awakenings and freedom struggles by his four weapons, Sawaraj, sawadeshi, boycott and Indian education.

Maratha. Maratha was also started by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, after Kesari. He emphatically defended Swaraj, the self-rule. He quoted in Marathi, "Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it". He was associated with many other Congress leaders including Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai, Aurobindo Ghose, Muhammad Ali Jinnah and V. O. Chidambaram Pillai.

Navjeevan. "A new life" It was a Gujarati weekly newspaper published by Gandhi in 1919 from Ahmadabad. He started his campaign for the fulfilment of his objective through *Navjivan*, and carried on his mission for peaceful attainment of Swaraj and to propagate khadi and spinning wheel, Hindu-Muslim unity, removal of untouchability, widow remarriage, woman education and opposition to child marriage.

Swadesamitran. "Friends of self rule". It was founded by G Subramania Aiyer in 1880s was the first weekly Tamil newspaper latter in 1889 became daily. It was published from Madras and was a source of the Indian National awakening to arouse the nationalistic feelings among the Tamil people.

Amrita Bazaar Patrika. A Bengali weekly founded by the Ghosh brothers in February 1858 in the village of Amrita Bazaar in Jessore district of East Bengal (now Bangladesh) (Thiaga 1938.101-4). They fought for the cause of peasants who were exploited by indigo planters. In 1871, the newspaper moved to Calcutta because of the outbreak of plague in Amrita Bazaar. In Calcutta it was circulated as a bilingual weekly, in English and Bengali languages. The anti-government writings, news and popularity of Amrit Bazar Patrika became the problem for British Governor Lord Lytton. He promulgated The Vernacular Press Act 1878.

Neel Derpan. A play in Bengali was published by Dinbandu Mitra in 1860. He took the issue of the indigo planters. (Bandyopadhyay 2004.193)

Hindustan. Madan Mohan Malaviya was the founder editor of *Hindustan* a Hindi weekly newspaper. He also credited with the publication of the 'Indian Union' a weekly English newspaper. He remained the Chairman of The Hindustan Times from 1924 to 1946. He emphasised on the education and believed that the freedom from the British rule can be achieved only through right kind of education.

Swadeshabhimani, Mathrubhumi and Malayala Manorama were started in Kerala to propagate and spread the message of the freedom struggle. In 1910 for anti-British stance the owner of the *Swadeshabhimani* was punished and deported. In 1938 the press property of Malayala Manorama was ceased. In 1942, Damodara Menon, the editor of *Matrubhumi* was arrested for propagating anti British movement, the Quit India movement.

Crescent. The newspaper was started by Gazulu Lakshminarasu Chetty in Madras. Chetty was a social reformer and activist of Indian National Movement founded Madras Native Association. For the propagation of education and national sentiments he started working through this paper (Suntharalingum 1958)

Press Legislations

Censor Act 1799. Lord Wellesley passed an Act for newspapers should print the names of the printers, editors and proprietors. Before printing any matter in newspapers, magazines or journals should be submitted to the Secretary of Censorship. The Act was abolished in 1818 by Warren Hastings.

Licensing regulation Act 1823. It was another restriction on Indian newspapers by John Adam. The printers and publishers had to obtain a licence to start the

press. Regulation put restriction on editors to get a licence from the government (Thiaga 1938-85). The defaulters would be fined of Rs 400 besides the press would be confiscated by the government and had right to cancel the license as well. All the rights of issue and revoke of the licence were restricted to Governor General. The regulation was against the vernacular languages. The newspaper, *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* of Rajaram Mohan Roy was affected mostly and ultimately stopped its circulation (Thiaga 1938-85). This Act was abolished by Charles Metcalf.

Press Act of 1835

The Act is also known as Metcalfe Act. He wanted the liberation of the press in India. In 1835 he repealed the rude Act of 1823 and gained the title of "liberator of the Indian Press" (Heena Naqvi. P.65)

The Licensing Act, 1857.

During the Revolt of 1857, the government imposed once again the restrictions on the press on printing newspapers, journals and magazines. The printers and publishers had to receive the licence and the governor was the chief authority to revoke or issue a new licence.

The Registration Act, 1867.

The Act was the regulation of printing of newspapers and books but not to put restrictions on the press. In this Act the publisher had to mention the name of the printer and publisher along with the name of the place on the book from where it was published. After one month of publication a free copy of the book had to supply to the local government.

Vernacular Press Act of 1878. Vernacular newspapers criticised the British rule in India. Therefore, British Govt was angry with the Vernacular Press and passed the Vernacular Press Act by Lord Lytton in 1878. The Magistrates were empowered to ask any publisher of a newspaper circulated in Indian languages to give assurance of not publishing anything against the British Rule (Heena Naqvi. P.65). The security guarantee was fixed for them. The defaulter would be punished and fined. This law was not applicable to English Press. Lord Ripon repealed this Act in 1882 (The economic weekly-347).

Newspaper Act of 1908. In this Act the magistrate was empowered to confiscate the property of press if they published objectionable material in their newspapers, journals and magazines.

Indian Press Act, 1910. This Act empowered local government to get security at registration from the printer, publisher and deregister if it found the offender. The printer or publisher had to submit two copies of each issue to the local government free of cost. Bal Gangadhar Tilak the leader of extremist nationalism was tried and deported to Mandalay for six years on charges of sedition. His trial led to countrywide protests. Textile and railways workers took on the Army in streets and roads and went on strike for days.

Indian Press Act, 1931. This Act gave full power to provincial governments to suppress propaganda for Civil Disobedience Movement (The economic weekly-348).

The officials Secrets Act. The Act banned Indian National Congress and its activities were declared illegal.

Indian Nationalists and Press

The main agenda before the Indian nationalists was to protect their freedom of opinion, public interests and national sentiments etc from the despotic British Rule. The vernacular press was the main tool to educate people of the country. After the revolt of 1857 the National awakening deep rooted in the masses as no political share was given to the Indian and were deprived of their basic rights. The only way to propagate the national awakening was the freedom of the press. The obnoxious Acts and Regulations put the noose to vernacular press time to time, were the hurdles for Indian journalists to publish and propagate the nationalist ideology and agitations, training, mobilisation and strengthen of public outlook. Newspapers in local languages put a great impact on the public because the articles widely circulated in the rural area whereas the English newspapers were confined to the cities and their readers were from upper and middle class. The Vernacular newspaper gained no profit whereas the British run earned money by publishing advertisements etc (Mohit 1955. 13)

Various important newspapers emerged during this period were mostly in vernacular languages and were the production of fearless nationalist journalists. They were Hindu and Swadesamitran started by G. Subramaniya Aiyar, Voice of India by Dadabhai Naoroji, Amrita Bazar Patrika by Sisir Kumar Ghosh and Motilal Ghosh, Kesari (in Marathi) and Maharatta (in English) by Balgangadhar Tilak, The Bengalee by Surendranath Banerjee, Indian Mirror by N.N. Sen, Sudharak by Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and Hindustan by G.P. Verma. The newspapers circulated from other parts of the country were Indu Prakash, Gujarati, Kal and Dhyan Prakash from Bombay and Banganivasi, Som Prakash, and Sadharani from Bengal and Tribune and Akbar-i-am from Punjab.

The national journalists stood against the British political propaganda and alive the public sentiments and paved the way for the Indian liberation by securing the

freedom of the Indian press. (Chandra, Bipin (1981).162).

Conclusion

The Vernacular newspapers, journals and magazine etc. continued the circulations and propagations of Social Reforms, National Awakening and National Movement being faced censorships, fines and confiscations of press. They worked for the struggle for freedom from Foreign Rule over India. The Vernacular newspapers educated the masses and stood for social, religious, cultural and economic reforms. Indian Press was not the business enterprises like the present era. The press served for National Sentiments. The Vernacular printed media worked like a national servant, propagator, freedom fighter and a weapon for the liberation of the country from the British exploitation and got freedom for India.

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